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THE ELEMENTARY SCHOOL TEACHER

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PROVISION FOR GIFTED CHILDREN IN PUBLIC SCHOOLS¹

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During the past decade much attention has been given in public-school systems to the problem of the backward, delinquent, and defective children who clog the lower grades of our schools and retard the progress of the children of normal mentality. Their presence in ordinary classes imposes upon the teacher the necessity of devoting an undue portion of time and attention to the few from whose education society will benefit least, to the disadvantage of the many who can better profit by the instruction given; and hence it has come about that in many city-school systems special classes are provided for children of subnormal intellect in which they may receive an education suited to their peculiar needs. This is good policy for two reasons: every such child has a right to enough education to make him as useful as the limitation of his natural endowment will permit; and economy in administration is observed by so much segregation of the backward as will permit the teaching of normally constituted children in reasonably large classes. This cannot be done in a manner fair to the children in our schools when 50 per cent. of the teacher's time and energy must be given to 5 per cent. of the children in the class. So the movement for special classes for the few—possibly 2 per cent. of the whole number—who cannot

¹ Paper read before the Department of Superintendence of the National Education Association, March, 1910.

profit by instruction as given under ordinary school conditions is undoubtedly in the right direction. I would go farther and say that another group of children, numbering possibly 8 or 10 per cent. of the whole school enrollment, intermediate in mental grasp between the extreme cases and the great body of average children, should receive such individual attention as cannot be given in large classes. It does not fall to my lot today to discuss the proper handling of these two groups of children, but I desire to leave no doubt in your minds as to the very great importance which I attach to the proper instruction of the slower children. Most of them will later develop marked strength, and it is by no means safe to conclude that the slow child of today will be the slow child two years hence.

The topic assigned to me assumes that there are children at the other extreme of ability for whom also special provision should be made. These are the pupils of more than ordinary power who should not be restricted to exactly the same curriculum nor held to the moderate pace which is necessarily set by the ability to progress shown by the great body of children. President Eliot has often called attention to the importance of discovering these capable individuals and giving them opportunities commensurate with their abilities, so that society may use them "to lift the whole population to a higher plane of intelligence, conduct, and happiness." Theoretically, most people are willing to admit that the general tendency in a democracy is to bring all men to a common level; that the level toward which we tend is the level of the average intelligence rather than that exemplified in the genius; and that the only way to lift the whole population is to develop capable individuals to take the lead in the lifting. It cannot be denied that the graded school system, by its tendency toward uniformity, has operated toward making us satisfied with a medium level of attainment. Undoubtedly, one of its effects has been to raise many individuals to a higher level than they might otherwise have attained, and this is good; but, on the other hand, it has made many other individuals satisfied with lower attainments than those of which they were capable, and this is not good. It is not easy to break the "cake

of custom" that fifty years of uniformity have created; but now that such signal process has been made in the proper education of children at the lower levels of ability, we may hope for at least equally valuable results from special attention to children of exceptionally strong mental endowment. For the purpose of this discussion these children are spoken of as "gifted." By the gifted child we do not mean the genius in the sense of which Mr. Galton uses the term. We refer to a more numerous class of children endowed with somewhat more of intellectual power and energy than the great mass of children in our schools. Of course there is no clear-cut line of division anywhere between the various groups. They shade into each other, and we shall often be in doubt as to the group in which a child belongs; but even under such circumstances there is a gain for education, because we shall sooner solve a problem by recognizing it as a problem than by ignoring it altogether. Statistics are available showing about how many subnormal children there are among every one thousand, but we do not know how many gifted children there are among every one thousand children born into the world. We do not know because we have not been looking for them. Under the operation of school attendance laws, instead of easily getting rid of the dullards and laggards, as we too often formerly did, we are undertaking not to crowd them out but to hold them and teach them, and it is an easy problem to discover who they are. They force themselves upon our attention. We cannot be ignorant of their presence. Too often, on the other hand, we fail to notice that some children in our classes might do much more work than we are requiring of them. From time to time a few, by reason of their special aptness, have commanded our notice, but we have not considered that they needed any special opportunities. We have, as a rule, held that these bright children would in some way take very good care of themselves, and that if a child had any special ability he would make his way in spite of all obstacles. This may be true of the extremely limited number of individuals included in Mr. Galton's definition of genius; for he holds that the actual genius is the only genius; or, in other words, that the only individuals of superior native ability

are the ones who have demonstrated that superior ability by actual accomplishment; and conversely, that those who have not actually demonstrated the possession of superior native powers do not possess them. He rules out the extremely important factor "opportunity." According to Lester F. Ward,

The only true test of genius (ability) is trial. But unless the conditions for trial are present there can be no trial, and without trial under favorable conditions there is no basis for judging whether there be genius or no.

Ward's position in this matter, though somewhat over-sanguine, is to my mind more reasonable than Galton's.

Great men [he says] have been produced by the co-operation of two causes, genius and opportunity; neither alone can accomplish it. But genius is a constant factor, very abundant in every rank of life, while opportunity is a variable factor and chiefly artificial. As such it is something that can be supplied practically at will. The actual manufacture, therefore, of great men, of the agents of civilization, of the instruments of achievement, is not a utopian conception but a practical undertaking it consists in the extension to all the members of society of an equal opportunity for the exercise of whatever powers each may possess.

How slight an opportunity to develop whatever powers they may possess have children who drop out of school and enter the ranks of unskilled labor as soon as the law permits! Often a parent is unaware that his gifted child is the possessor of any special talent unless so informed by the teacher. When so informed, not infrequently a parent will keep his child in school even at the sacrifice of the small but important pecuniary aid which the child's labor would afford. By dealing thus with parents whose only capital is their labor, teachers are able to aid very materially in bringing genius and opportunity together. But keeping children in school is not enough. Adherence to fixed and unchangeable courses of study and to inflexible schemes of classification fall far short of furnishing equal opportunity to all in our schools. Total lack of systematic procedure would equally fail to secure the desired equality of opportunity, for stimulation and guidance must be well organized and constant. We hear of isolated instances of such stimulation and guidance, but not often

of well-organized schemes which may be applied on a large scale, as in a city system of schools.

There is a considerable body of literature on the subject of backward children, the lower 10 per cent. of our enrollment, but very little on the upper 10 per cent., the gifted. Mr. Kendall's presentation of the case of the ablest pupils, two years ago, is the only one giving definite plans of procedure that I can find in the *Proceedings of the National Education Association*. The Mannheim scheme of classification (briefly described on pp. 43-47 and 121-23 of *Bulletin No. 376, Bureau of Education*, entitled "The Auxiliary Schools of Germany") makes special provision for the abler pupils by grouping them in separate divisions. The "Report of the Committee on Provision for Exceptional Children in the Public Schools," presented at the Cleveland meeting of the N. E. A., devotes the greater part of its space to abnormal and subnormal children. Only one page is devoted to provision for exceptionally capable children, and the attitude taken by the committee is that the problem, while immensely important, remains unsolved. Their position will be made clear by the following quotation (*Proc. N. E. A.*, pp. 350, 351):

In our conception of what the gifted child should do, we are inclined to look too exclusively upon the shorter time in which he can accomplish the tasks of the conventional course of study. Until we comprehend that for the gifted child a somewhat different atmosphere should be provided, that, too, a different curriculum should be developed, we shall accomplish little.

While the saving of time is not unimportant, the really important consideration is the ideal of effort and accomplishment which the child is forming. It is essential, therefore, that these gifted children have the stimuli that will react upon them in such a way as to cause them to become as vigorous in will as they are acute in intellect; for there is reason to believe that great achievements in leadership are due more to strength of will than to mere intelligence.

In the same volume Dr. Charles A. A. J. Miller, of Baltimore, devotes a half-page to this topic (p. 959). The "Report of the Committee on Six-Year Course of Study" is suggestive, especially in recommendation 4 (*Proc. N. E. A.*, 1908, p. 627). A

year later the same committee made a report (*Proc. N. E. A.*, 1909, 498-503) in which there appear twelve brief statements of plans designed to meet the needs of pupils of varying ability. In the same volume (pp. 175-82), Mr. Walter Siders presents an excellent discussion of certain phases of the subject.

The value of any plan must be measured by its results. We cannot expect complete and convincing reports of results in the early stages in the operation of any plan; but where, as in Indianapolis, Worcester, Baltimore, and elsewhere, special provision made for the abler pupils has been in operation for several years, a tentative statement might at this time be possible. For instance, where high-school credits have been earned by elementary school pupils, it would be possible to make a numerical statement of that particular kind of result and to say something specific as to the class rank of such pupils upon graduation from the high school. Such a statement would be of more value for comparison than an indefinite remark to the effect that by means of a given plan "many pupils save considerable time" or "some pupils are able to complete the high-school course in three years." Instead, therefore, of indulging in indefinite statements, I shall attempt to give a brief statistical report of measurable results accomplished by means of a plan, common to several cities, which, beginning in a small way in the fall of 1902, we have been using in Baltimore. The plan, in brief, is to allow pupils who have done strong work in the sixth grade, with the approval of their parents, to take up extra studies of high-school grade while doing the regular work of the seventh and eighth grades of the elementary school. These studies are Latin, German, advanced English, and, in exceptional cases, some of the mathematics of the first high-school year. Pupils who take this work are transferred to a convenient center in which enough pupils may be gathered together to allow the instruction to be organized on the departmental plan. We started in 1902 with one center, enrolling 173 pupils, and that year we admitted pupils of the eighth grade as well as the seventh. In 1903 and later, admission was limited to pupils just entering the seventh grade. We now have four centers with an enrollment at present of 571 pupils in these

preparatory seventh and eighth grades. For three years one of these centers has been allowed, by way of experiment, to keep selected pupils for an extra year. Such pupils spend but two years in the high school. Other preparatory pupils ordinarily spend three years in the high school; but in either case, for preparatory pupils the time required for high-school graduation after the sixth elementary grade has ordinarily been five years, whereas six years would have been required had it not been for the high-school credits earned in the elementary school.

The preparatory arrangement was in only a formative and transitory stage during 1902-3, 1903-4, 1904-5. High-school adjustments also were quite difficult at first. Hence, of pupils promoted to high school in 1903, 1904, and 1905, a majority were unable to graduate in three high-school years. With the preparatory class promoted in June, 1905, the tide turns.

Promotion from Preparatory	Total Graduations from High School	Graduations in Three Years	Graduations in Four Years
1903.....	27	4	23
1904.....	42	8	34
1905.....	39	27	12
1906.....	48	42	6
1907.....	(Not yet available)	39	(Not yet available)

In other words—

At High-School Graduation of	Preparatory in Two Years	Preparatory in Three Years	Preparatory in Four Years
1906.....	..	4	(Could not be)
1907.....	..	8	23
1908.....	..	27	34
1909.....	16	42	12
1910.....	25	39	6
	41	120	75

The first preparatory-school pupils were graduated from the high school in 1906. By June, 1910, 236 in all will have graduated. Of these, 41 were in the high school proper but two years; 120 were in high school three years, and 75 four years. Among the latter were 57 who spent but one year—the eighth—in a

preparatory center, the one which was opened in 1902. While these 75 pupils who, in the early days of the plan, spent four years in the high school did not save any time, they enjoyed marked advantages. They earned 13,050 credits, or an average of 174 each; whereas the number required for graduation was only 150. It is quite evident that the high-school course pursued by these pupils, though not shortened, was made much fuller and richer than it would have been had they entered from the ordinary eighth grade.

To make clearer this general statement about the 75 preparatory pupils who spent the usual four years in the high school, a few particular instances are selected. Fourteen girls, graduating in 1907, gained an average scholarship rank of 46 in a class of 147, or 27 places above the middle of the class. Two of these girls stood, respectively, first and seventh in the class, and four others were among the first twenty in scholarship rank. The average number of credits earned by members of this company was 162. Twenty-two girls graduating from the high school in 1908 secured average scholarship rank of 48 in a class of 160, or 32 places above the middle of the class; and three of them stood, respectively, first, second, and third in the class, while four others ranked among the first twenty. The average number of credits earned by those in this group was 166. Nine preparatory boys, graduating from the high school in 1907, won an average scholarship rank of 34 in a class of 103, or eighteen places above the middle of the class; and four of them ranked among the first ten in their class. The average number of credits earned by members of this company was 192—very greatly in excess over the required 150. Thirteen preparatory boys graduating from the high school in 1908 won an average scholarship rank of 49 in a class of 120, or eleven places above the middle of the class. The average number of credits earned by members of this group was 189, an excess of 39 over requirements.

A study of individual records of high-school graduates who came from the preparatory classes shows in general that a notable gain was experienced in one of two ways: either the student gained a year or more in time, securing the high-school diploma

in three years or less instead of taking the customary four years; or the student, though spending four years in the high school, was able to rank among the honor graduates of his class and to secure a much broader and richer training than the regular four-year student secured. In a relatively larger number of cases where the student took a third preparatory year in the single center offering this extra preparatory year, distinct gain was experienced in both these directions at the same time, because the high-school diploma was secured after only two years in the high school proper, and the student also stood among the honor graduates.

Six preparatory-class boys who spent three years in preparatory class and only two in high school, and who graduated in June, 1909, won a rank of 34 in a class of 133, or 32 places above the middle of the class, and two were among the first twenty in the class. Eight girls from the same preparatory class, graduating from the high school at the same time, made an average rank of 21 in a class of 161, or 59 places above the middle of the class (in Baltimore boys and girls go to different high schools). One of these girls stood second in her class and three others were among the first twenty. The average number of credits earned by this company of boys and girls was 165, or 15 in excess of requirements. Two hundred and thirty-six preparatory pupils will have been graduated from the high schools in the four years ending in June, 1910. This is not a large showing when we consider that in these four years the same high schools (three out of the five in our city) have graduated 1,342 pupils; but the plan is very new compared with the usual one, and a number of obstacles must yet be overcome. Some parents do not fully understand the plan. Not all teachers can be quite impartial in their attitude toward a scheme of work which takes away from the regular classes some of the more desirable pupils. Furthermore, many pupils entering the seventh grade are timid about going to a strange school located at a point somewhat distant from their homes; and so it happens that only about one-third of those recommended as capable of taking up the extra preparatory work avail themselves of the opportunity offered. If the work

were carried on in every large school so that pupils could enter upon it without being transferred away from the home school, doubtless more would attend; but unless there are enough enrolled at one point to form at least three classes, the teaching cannot be economically provided for. For this reason we are using for the preparatory classes only selected centers, and for the further reason that our plan enables us to utilize schoolrooms in portions of the city where the population is decreasing and where consequently some schoolrooms have become vacant.

There are now enrolled in our preparatory classes in the elementary schools 571 pupils, and in the high schools, exclusive of students to graduate in June, there are now 223 students who were promoted from preparatory classes. Mr. Ward's statement that genius is not restricted to any rank of life is borne out, in the case of our preparatory pupils, by the interesting fact that in these classes are to be found boys and girls representing every rank of the social order and wide variety of home conditions. To take this material and, following Ward, make "leaders and builders of civilization" out of it is an ambitious undertaking—so ambitious that we do not aim so high; but, judging by the energy and enthusiasm that these selected pupils put into their work, and the marked success which they have so far attained as measured by school standards, we are quite certain that they will display somewhat more of energy and efficiency in whatever field of life-effort they enter than if, during their school days, they had become contented with a lower level of effort and attainment.